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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SEOUL 001888

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [MNUC](#) [SOCI](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [KS](#) [IR](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: MOFAT MIDDLE EAST DG ON IRAN, SYRIA AND NORTH KOREA

Classified By: DCM MARK A. TOKOLA. REASONS 1.4 (B/D)

Summary

1. (C) MOFAT Middle East Bureau Director General Kim Jin-soo told the DCM that the ROK was deeply concerned about Iran's defiant reaction to the November 27 IAEA Board of Governor's resolution. The DG, noting the ROK had voted with the U.S. on the resolution, emphasized that Seoul would follow Washington's lead on Iran votes at the UN and IAEA "when it really mattered." According to Kim, the ROK would review its ties with Iran, specifically focusing on how to balance Korean commercial interests with the international community's concerns about Tehran's nuclear program. The DG related that the Iranians were pressing hard for an exchange of presidential visits and for Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani to visit Seoul; the ROK had turned down both proposals, but was permitting low-level official exchanges to proceed. Kim related that the North Korean ambassador to Syria recently parried an effort by Seoul to establish diplomatic relations with Damascus. End summary.

MOFAT Middle East DG: With You on Iran IAEA BOG Vote...

2. (C) During a November 30 lunch hosted by the DCM, MOFAT Middle East Bureau Director General Kim Jin-soo said the ROK was deeply concerned about Iran's defiant reaction to the November 27 IAEA Board of Governor's resolution, in particular Tehran's threat to significantly expand its uranium enrichment capability. The DG stressed that Seoul had been urging Tehran to take advantage of the P5 1's outreach; the strident reaction to the BOG vote was troubling, Kim said. Though it had been difficult to cast a vote that would enrage its fourth-largest crude oil supplier, Korea had sided with the United States during Friday's IAEA BOG meeting. The DG emphasized that, on Iran, the ROK would vote with the United States at the UN and the IAEA "when it really mattered."

...So Cut Us Some Slack on the Human Rights Resolution

3. (C) In return for voting with us on Iran "when it really mattered," DG Kim argued that the United States should not push Korea too hard for its abstention on the UN resolution condemning Iran's human rights abuses. Kim reminded us that Korean companies do a significant amount of business with Iran. Tehran had pressed hard for Seoul to oppose the human rights resolution; the abstention, the DG indicated, partially placated the Iranians and allegedly helped shield ROK companies from potential retribution. Kim asserted that the ROK's significant commercial interests in Iran made it

difficult for the ROKG to oppose Iran on what the DG characterized as "non-critical" issues. (Note: The DCM made refotel points about the Daelim company, which will be reported septel. End note).

#### Next Steps?

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14. (C) Given Iran's reaction to the IAEA resolution, Kim said, the ROK would review its ties with Iran, specifically focusing on how to balance Korean commercial interests with the international community's concerns about Tehran's nuclear program. The DG related that the Iranians were pressing hard for an exchange of presidential visits and for Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani to visit Seoul; the ROKG had turned down both proposals, but was permitting low-level official exchanges to proceed. (Note: In a private discussion before the lunch began, Middle East Division I Director Yeo Sung-jun told us President Obama's discussion of Iran with President Lee Myung-bak had been helpful in elevating the importance of the issue within the Blue House -- thus making it easier for like-minded officials at MOFAT to push for a tougher line on Iran. End note.)

#### ROK Outreach to Syria Parried by North Korea

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15. (C) In closing, DG Kim offered some insight into how the ROK interacts with North Korea in the Middle East. Kim said that, as part of an ongoing effort to establish diplomatic ties with Syria, the ROK opened a Korea Trade-Investment

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Promotion Agency (KOTRA) office November 12 in Damascus. To underscore the office's significance, the ROK Ambassador to Lebanon had asked to attend the ribbon-cutting ceremony. According to the DG, the DPRK Ambassador to Syria, Kim Jong-il crony Choi Soo-hwan, allegedly bullied the Syrians into rejecting the request and throttling back on their interaction with Seoul. DG Kim said Choi's conduct stood in contrast to that of the DPRK ambassador in Kuwait, Ho Jong. Ambassador Ho, a veteran of the Agreed Framework negotiations and a former Foreign Ministry spokesman, had excellent relations with his South Korean counterpart and met frequently with ROK embassy staffers, DG Kim said.

STEPHENS